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DEPARTMENT FOR SA/FO, SA/A, SCA/PAB, G/IWI SLOPEZ
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE
NSC FOR HARRIMAN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KPAO](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: NOMINATIONS FOR WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: SECSTATE 12871

¶1. In response to reftel, Embassy Kabul submits the following two candidates for the Women of Courage Award. Per email instructions from G/IWI, both women speak English.

¶2. (SBU) Mary Akrami is Director of a non-governmental organization called the Afghan Women Skills Development Center. Under the rubric of this NGO, she runs one of Kabul's two women's shelters. Most women have come to the shelter to escape domestic violence or forced marriages. The shelter never turns anyone away, so it often exceeds its capacity for 25 people at the shelter. The women are allowed to stay at the shelter as long as they need to while they recover from the violence they have suffered, often at the hands of a male relative. There are several women at the shelter with high-profile legal cases pending in the Afghan court system; several women at the shelter have made the bold and virtually unprecedented move of stepping forward and denouncing their abusers publicly and filing court cases against them. Thanks to legal intervention provided by the shelter, one woman was recently awarded a divorce from her abusive husband. Akrami has previously moved the shelter's location to avoid detection by angry family members who are actively looking for women housed there. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has referred women to her shelter, and Mary takes them all in. Many women have brought their children to the shelter, and the rooms are filled with children's laughter. Several women have arrived at the shelter pregnant, and they have had their children while living at the shelter. Many women arrive with nothing but the clothes on their back, and Akrami undertakes to provide them with the basics such as clothes, toiletries, medicine, bedding, and food. Akrami has a dedicated staff who are provide legal advice, literacy classes, psychological counseling, and basic skills training. Akrami and her staff often receive phone calls in the middle of the night from women in crisis, and they always respond to the calls. Mary Akrami is dedicated to her work, and is on call for women who need her assistance 24 hours a day. She and her staff have received threats against them for the work they are doing to help women, and harassing phone calls are a regular occurrence. Akrami refuses to be intimidated by such threats. The women's shelter is often the last hope for women desperate to escape their life-threatening circumstances and regain control over their lives. There are only two shelters in all of Kabul, and only Akrami's shelter provides comprehensive assistance (legal, psychological, and educational) and permits women to stay longer than a few nights.

¶3. (SBU) Non-governmental organization Action Aid Women's Rights Coordinator Aziza Siddiqui is an women's rights activist in the field who travels frequently into the far

reaches of the countryside in Afghanistan to conduct first-hand research on the situation of women living there. Siddiqui previously worked as a gender researcher for think tank "Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit." There she focused on reporting on women's access to land and livestock, the quality of girls' education in public schools, and labor migration. Siddiqui also previously worked for the Ministry of Research and Rural Development as the special advisor to the Deputy Minister for Programs. Her responsibilities included monitoring the progress of the National Solidarity Program, which focused on empowering rural communities to make decisions on local governance issues. Her current work at Action Aid includes educating rural women living in the Northern Provinces on their rights. To do this, she organizes meetings with women in which she facilitates training on how women can make decisions for themselves. She has conducted these meetings in 50 villages, with 20-22 women participants in each meeting, and an additional 30 meetings are scheduled. The program was so successful in the North that it has been expanded to central Ghazni Province. Siddiqui is also conducting research on violence against girls in public high schools and how that may impede their access to education, and she is slated to begin research on violence against women in prison in the near future. Despite personal threats against her for her groundbreaking research on gender, Siddiqui continues to forge ahead with her investigation into the lives of women around the country and uses that information as a platform to draw attention to the needs that women have.

14. (SBU) Post would also like to nominate the deceased Director of Women's Affairs for Kandahar Province Safia Amajan for an honorary posthumous award. Mrs. Amajan was murdered on September 25, 2006 for her efforts to help women. Mrs. Amajan was shot down by a gunman who opened fire on her as she was leaving her home for work in a public taxi. Mrs. Amajan, a well-known activist for women's rights, secretly teaching classes for women and girls in her home, even during the Taliban period, served as the Director of the Women's Affairs Department in Kandahar once the Taliban were toppled in 2001. She was a fierce critic of the Taliban's oppression of women. Following specific threats made against their lives, Mrs. Amajan's son and disabled husband approached the Embassy for assistance. They were referred to UNHCR and are now in Islamabad, where they are registered as refugees. Post believes honoring Safia Amajan with this posthumous award would send a strong message that her murder does not erase her influence.

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